



Hepatitis A (Infectious Hepatitis)

Health Education Facts

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus transmitted by the fecal-oral route. This means that you must get something in your mouth which is contaminated with stool from an infected person.

Who gets hepatitis A?

Most infections result from contact with a household member or sexual partner who has hepatitis A.

Sometimes infection results from eating food or drink which is contaminated with the hepatitis A virus. Once a person recovers from hepatitis A, the person is immune for life and no longer contagious.

How soon after exposure do hepatitis A symptoms appear?

On average, symptoms appear one month after exposure and may include vomiting, diarrhea, and jaundice (whites of the eyes and skin become yellowish). The contagious period lasts from two weeks before to one week after the jaundice starts.

When symptoms are experienced it is important to seek medical care. Since there are several types of hepatitis, a blood test is needed to determine which type is present. Infected children should stay home from school and day care for 10 days following the onset of illness.

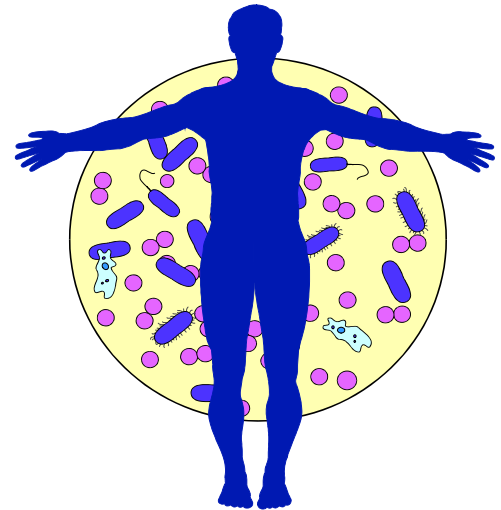
Diarrhea and vomiting can be caused by other things than hepatitis. Adults with moderate to severe gastrointestinal symptoms, particularly diarrhea lasting more than four days, should have a stool culture done through a physician or local health department.

What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

Rest and a balanced diet are usually all that is needed. There is no medication to treat hepatitis A.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

Handwashing with soap after toileting and diapering is one effective way to prevent the spread of hepatitis A. Gamma globulin (IG) can help prevent infection, and is recommended for people who live in the same house as a person with hepatitis A, to sexual contacts of a person with hepatitis A, or to other children in the same day care center with a child with hepatitis A. IG is NOT given to casual contacts of a person with hepatitis A, such as friends or coworkers, because the risk of infection in these situations is extremely



small.

Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for travelers to countries where hepatitis A is a common infection, and for high-risk adults in this country. Hepatitis A vaccine protects the person who receives it after about one month from the date it is administered. It is not useful for people who have already been exposed to the virus.